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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 001695

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: RECALL REFERENDA WILL EXACERBATE RIFTS

REF: LA PAZ 1692

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 b,d

11. (C) Summary: Although the opposition could try to stop the recall referenda, it seems almost certain that the election will take place on August 10. Already sporadic confrontations in connection with various strikes have caused deaths and injuries: while not expected, there could be violent flare-ups at voting locations given that tempers are running high. President Evo Morales needs only 46.3 percent votes in favor to continue in office, and he is currently polling at over 55 percent approval. Most of the prefects will probably also survive the recall vote. Despite the high cost of the campaigns and the election itself, observers are almost-unanimous in saying that the recall referendum will have no beneficial effect for Bolivia. In fact, Bolivia is likely to be more divided and less decided after the recall referendum, while Evo will use his almost-certain win to push forward his most radical policies. End summary.

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Evito: Don't Cry For Me, Bolivia
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12. (SBU) Probably the most scientific and reliable poll conducted in Bolivia regarding the recall referenda was released by Gallup International in July 2008. At the time, 61.1 percent of their respondents indicated that they would vote for Evo to continue as president, while 33.4 percent would vote against him and 5.5 percent were undecided. The percentage of voters in favor of Evo was highest in the department of La Paz (85.7 percent) and lowest in the department of Santa Cruz. Evo garnered more than 80 percent in the two other altiplano departments of Oruro and Potosi, while receiving less than 50 percent in all the opposition departments except Pando. Despite the disillusion of some of Evo's former middle-class supporters, he is almost certain to survive the recall vote, possibly with a higher majority than he received in the 2005 presidential election (53.7 percent).

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Prefects: Crying All the Way...Back to Their Offices
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13. (SBU) The voting rules for the prefects are still in doubt. According to the May 2008 law which called for the recall referenda, each prefect could be voted out by the same percentage and number of votes that voted him in. Because all of the prefects ran against more than one opponent, all of the prefects were elected with less than 50 percent of the overall vote and could therefore be recalled with less than 50 percent. On August 1, National Electoral Court President Jose Exeni announced that the national court and seven of nine regional courts had agreed to a "technical criteria adjustment" that would require 50 percent for the prefects to be recalled (Chuquisaca's prefect will not face a recall referenda, since she has been in office less two months.) However, the same day Vice President Garcia Linera announced that the Electoral Courts' "technical criteria adjustment" is only a suggestion. Although there were rumors that Congress was working on a new law that included the Courts' adjustment, it has not been promulgated. The National Electoral Court has declared that the vote will take place, but the criteria for deciding the results of the vote are still uncertain. The OAS observer mission is seriously troubled by having different criteria and is working to try to harmonize them in advance of the vote (reftel).

14. (SBU) The Gallup poll and other observers suggest that Santa Cruz Prefect Ruben Costas and Beni Prefect Ernesto Suarez are the most secure going into the referenda, with 75.6 percent and 79.0 percent, respectively, in their favor according to the Gallup poll. Cochabamba, La Paz, and Oruro may all see a change, since Gallup shows that over 50 percent of those polled would vote that the prefects be recalled. Potosi, Pando, and Tarija are still Against the president, with 12.5 percent undecided.

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A Tale of Two Bolivias
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15. (C) In the end, Evo and most of the prefects are expected to survive the recall vote, but this zero-sum game does not mean that nothing will have changed. Despite government rhetoric about how the referendum will allow Bolivians to put aside their differences at the ballot box, in fact the final result is almost certainly a more-divided Bolivia. Polls currently suggest that a majority of voters in Santa Cruz and Beni will vote against Evo, while over 45 percent of voters will vote against him in Chuquisaca and Tarija. Although Evo will have "won" overall, the referenda will highlight how much he is now president for only parts of the country. In the past week (and as reported before) Evo has been unable to enter opposition departments for fear of violence, leaving him only his traditional bases in the altiplano and coca-growing regions as safe-havens for political campaigning.

16. (C) Recent violence in Oruro may also complicate matters for Evo. State-employed miners from the nationalized Huanuni mine blocked a road between Cochabamba and La Paz, placing dynamite on the supports of a critical bridge. A large detachment of police was sent to clear the blockade, and during the conflict two miners were killed, dozens injured, and at least five police were injured. The miners also managed to detonate some of their explosives, damaging the bridge. The miners were called to protest by Bolivia's largest worker's union, the COB, which is demanding a more radical pension-plan than the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) proposal. The conflict has highlighted strange temporary alliances: Evo accused the state-employed miners of sedition, while opposition leaders sided with the extreme-left-wing COB. Chuquisaca Prefect Savina Cuellar gave a speech in her native Quechua mourning the deaths and calling for Evo to resign, saying that when Evo took office he said he would leave if there were any deaths. Meanwhile, Evo's spokesman Ivan Canelas had mild words of sympathy for state-employees killed in a clash with police, saying President Morales is "...a little concerned, a little sad for what has happened...we are concerned that two individuals died from

bullet wounds."

More Violence to Come?

¶7. (C) The Huanuni miners have already promised to block voting in their region of Oruro, and other ongoing conflicts (including hunger strikes in opposition departments and clashes between teachers and parent's groups) could add to the possibility of violence on August 10. MAS congressmen Simon Zurita and Toni Condori have both confided to Emboffs that they expect violence on the day of the referendum. Condori blamed any future violence on the opposition, "since they are the ones who called for the referendum," while Zurita, a more-moderate MASista, predicted that both the opposition and the MAS would "push the envelope" on intimidation in departments where the prefecturate could be up for grabs. Zurita added that the central government has a higher stake in the recall referendum than it did in the autonomy referendum, and that any violence will therefore be greater, "not the same pushing and shoving, this will be worse."

¶8. (SBU) Post has issued a warden message advising Amcits about the possibility of conflict and the legal restrictions surrounding the election. Under Bolivian law, no alcohol may be sold or consumed between midnight of August 7 and midnight of August 10. Firearms cannot be carried on August 10. Vehicle traffic on August 10 is prohibited except with prior permission from the National Electoral Court, and domestic flights will be canceled. We will be monitoring the situation closely and providing updates as necessary.

Comment

¶9. (C) After campaigns and election logistics that have cost millions of dollars, the only change directly attributable to the recall referendum is likely to be a change of one to three prefects. The actual result, however, will be much more dramatic than the mere ballot affects. If Evo receives more votes than he did during his original 2005 election (an outcome which most polls suggest is likely, despite his loss of middle-class support), Evo will view this as a mandate for change, particularly in support of socialist policies. Evo will become more radicalized by his new mandate, and we can expect a continuing anti-imperialist, that is, anti-American, campaign. The win will also likely embolden Evo to push through his draft constitution, possibly through extra-legal maneuverings. Only if Evo did poorly (less than 50 percent but still not recalled) might there be an opportunity for real dialogue, as the government would be weakened and perhaps recognize a need to compromise.

¶10. (C) In certain departments, however, the prefect is likely to win by a larger majority than Evo, and it appears likely that in some departments Evo will lose at the regional level. This end result will further polarize an already divided nation, since a prefect who wins by a large majority in a department where Evo loses could plausibly question which leader in fact is legitimate. No matter who wins, none of the polarizing issues will have been resolved, only divisions deepened and passions inflamed. End comment.
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